THE INDYPENDENT
#281: AUGUST 2023

NYCHA DEMOLITION — P12 • EPIC SUMMER BIKE RIDE — P15

TYRONE WALLACE

HOT LABOR SUMMER

HOW A RESURGENT LABOR MOVEMENT CONTINUES TO GAIN MOMENTUM

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN • PAGE 5

THE INDYPENDENT

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WILLIAM GOTTLIEB

AUGUST

FRI AUG 4 • 7–8PM • $10
QUEEROTICA COMEDY NIGHT
Queerotica Comedy is a hilarious show by exclusively LGBTQIA+ comics. The show producers say that "Sex is history and gay sex is neglected. This show celebrates the life of queer sex from the first African Queens to surefire homosexual Mike Pence. Each show highlights an artifact of queer sex and a lineup of comedians talking about queer sex!" *Go to https://rb.gy/4h1h5 for tickets.*
STRAND BOOK STORE
828 Broadway, Manhattan

AUG 5–SEP 17 • 2PM • FREE
STREET THEATER TOUR
Theater for the New City will be performing *Life on the Third Rail, or A Subway Delay to the Future* across the five boroughs in public spaces, Fridays and Saturdays at 2 p.m. This family-friendly, original musical tells the story of a train operator and subway conductor that have been left behind after the MTA moves above ground in the wake of devastating flooding caused by global warming.
For more, see Page 19 and theaterforthenewcity.net.

SAT AUG 5 • 12–7PM • FREE
GHANA FEST-NY 2023
The National Ghana Parade Council of New York and in collaboration with City Parks SummerStage is hosting the 14th Annual Ghana Fest. The festival will have music, dance, food and live performances that celebrate Ghanaian culture – including a performance by afropop/dancehall/reggae musician Stonebwoy.
CROTONA PARK
Crotona Ave & Claremont Pkwy, Bronx

AUG 11 • 6–10:30PM • FREE
BRIC HIP-HOP 50TH ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND
Brooklyn Information & Culture (BRIC) presents Hip-Hop 50th Anniversary Weekend at BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn, featuring iconic Afro-Futurist group Digable Planets and alt-rap performer Kari Fau. *Doors open at 6 p.m. Reserve free tickets at https://rb.gy/d6qgh*
LENA HORNE BANDSHELL
141 Prospect Park West, Brooklyn

SAT AUG 12 • 3–4:15PM • FREE
QUEENS MUSEUM GALLERY TOUR
Queens Museum is offering a tour of two of their exhibitions "Tracey Rose: Shooting Down Babylon" and "Aliza Nisenbaum: Queens, Lindo y Querida". The tour is offered in English and in Spanish.
QUEENS MUSEUM
Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens

AUG 12 10:30AM & AUG 13 4:30PM • $40
BLACK FEMINISM LIVES! SUMMIT
Black Women Radical and The School for Black Feminist Politics is hosting a two-day summit in celebration of the 50th anniversary of National Black Feminist Organization. A watershed moment in history of Black feminist politics, the NBFO gave rise to other formidable and pioneering Black left feminist organizations such as the Combahee River Collective and the National Alliance of Black Feminists. Keynote speakers are Kimberly Springer and Keeanga Yamhatta-Taylor. Itinerary includes film screenings and panels on subjects such as colorism, abolition, and reproductive justice. *Tickets at https://www.blackwomenradicals.com/nbfo-summit*
PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W 37th S, Manhattan

THU AUG 17 • 6:30–8:30PM • $6
PAN AFRICAN FILM SERIES, *YEELEN*
The People's Forum will be screening *Yeelen* as a part of their Pan-African film series. *Yeelen* recounts the mythic tale of a power struggle between father and son. Soma Diarra, the jealous father and member of a feared Bambara secret society, plots to kill his son and rival, Nianankoro.
PEOPLE'S FORUM
320 W 37th S, Manhattan

SUN AUG 20 • 1–3PM • FREE
QUEER BOOK CLUB
Bluestockings' queer book club meets the third Sunday of every month on Zoom. August's book is Sabrina Imbler's *How Far the Light Reaches, My Life in Ten Sea Creatures.* Imbler's book revolves around their identity and queerness, but weaves those subjects with marine biology, "implicitly connecting endangered sea life to marginalized human communities and asking how they and we adapt, survive and care for each other".
Register online at www.withfriends.co/event/16331639/queer_book_club

FRI AUG 25 • 8–10PM • FREE
MOVIES UNDER THE STARS/BRAZILIAN FILM FEST, *DOM SALVADOR AND ABOLITION*
The film follows Dom Salvador, "the godfather of soul", an Afro-Brazilian musician who came to New York after fleeing from Brazil's military dictatorship in 1973. The film is shown as a part of the City's free *Movies Under the Stars* program and the 27th annual Brazilian Film Festival.
COMMODORE BARRY PARK LAWN AREA
Park Ave & North Elliot Pl, Brooklyn

BIRD IS THE WORD: *Charlie Parker at The Three Deuces jazz club in New York in 1947. The Charlie Parker Jazz Festival will be held August 25–27 at Marcus Garvey Park and Tompkins Square Park.*

AUG 25 7–9PM & AUG 26–27 3–7PM • FREE
2023 CHARLIE PARK JAZZ FESTIVAL
As a part of the annual 2023 Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, concerts will be held in Marcus Garvey Park and Tompkins Square Park all weekend Aug.25–27. The 2023 lineup includes veteran players and newer artists, including legendary saxophonist Charles McPherson! *Go to https://cityparksfoundation.org/charlieparker/ for more.*
AUG 25 & 26:
MARCUS GARVEY PARK
18 Mt. Morris Park West, Manhattan
AUG 27:
TOMPKINS SQUARE PARK
E 7th St, Manhattan

SUN AUG 27 • 3PM • FREE
THE WHITNEY 'S QUEER HISTORY WALKING TOUR
Meet in front of the Whitney Museum of American Art on Sunday, Aug. 27 at 3 p.m. for a free walking tour about the vibrant queer history of the neighborhood. This informative walk will visit sites that were important to the queer community, from gay clubs to the Hudson River Piers.
WHITNEY MUSEUM
99 Gansevoort St, Manhattan

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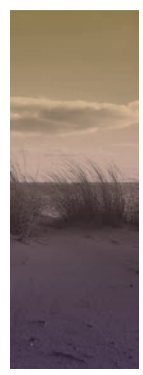
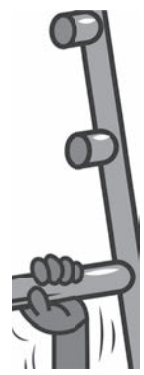

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KENNETH LOPEZ

CRUSHING DISSENT: *A Black Lives Matter protester is arrested by the NYPD during the summer of 2020.*

BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTERS RECEIVE RECORD SETTLEMENT

THEY PROTESTED POLICE VIOLENCE AND THEN WERE VICTIMS OF IT

By John Tarleton

Three years ago this summer, tens of thousands of New Yorkers took to the streets on a near-daily basis to protest police violence and the killing of George Floyd. They in turn were greeted with violence by the NYPD. On July 19, the city settled a class-action lawsuit for about $13.7 million that will go to protesters who endured unlawful police tactics, the largest financial settlement of its kind in U.S. history. The settlement comes on the heels of two related lawsuits involving police abuses during the George Floyd protests that the City settled for millions of dollars in damages.

The Indypendent spoke with Savitri Durkee, longtime New York City activist and plaintiff to the lawsuit, about the significance of the settlement and the NYPD's history of violence toward protest movements. Durkee was present at a June 4, 2020 protest in Mott Haven, Bronx in which the police surrounded, attacked and arrested roughly 400 protesters, many of them young people who appeared to her to be participating in their first protest movement.

"The NYPD came there with a battle plan, and they enacted that plan," she recalled. "I saw police pulling people's glasses off their face and crushing them to the ground. I saw the police beating people with batons. I saw the police arresting medics who were trying to come to people's aid. It was incredibly violent."

THE INDYPENDENT: What do you think this settlement accomplishes?

SAVITRI DURKEE: For a lot of protesters who were out there, this financial settlement could be life-changing. You can get a car. You can go to CUNY for a couple of semesters or move out of your friend's basement. For other recipients, it will take the pressure off covering monthly bills, or allow them to take a little rest.

It's disappointing we didn't get a real commitment from the NYPD to change their behavior, or an apology, or even an acknowledgement of wrongdoing. These moments are complicated. It's not a victory, but it's something to hold onto. The settlement doesn't address the injustice, but it does address our right to protest the injustice. Our First Amendment rights may not be valued, but at least they are still recognized.

You worked closely with the legal team. Tell us about what went on behind the scenes that ultimately led to this settlement.

Every one of the plaintiffs was deposed by a lawyer working for the City. I spent three hours answering questions from the lawyer about what happened to me. It was rigorous and intense. They asked, "What happened? Where were you standing? What were you doing? Then what happened? Who touched you? How were you arrested? Who was your arresting officer?" Endless questions of that nature.

We had an amazing team of lawyers, many of whom have been around in New York City and working on First Amendment and civil-rights issues for decades. They deposed arresting officers and people who were involved in suppressing the protests up to a very high level in the NYPD.

There was a year of intense mediation around the case. There was a lot of talk about injunctive relief, which would involve training, and procedures, and things the NYPD would or wouldn't do. Attorney General Letitia James and others are still in conversation with the NYPD about that.

But, we pulled out of that conversation when it seemed clear we would not achieve our goals with the NYPD.

Talk about how technology was used by the plaintiffs to identify the abuses that the police committed.

There was a group called SITU that analyzed a ton of video and photographs. During the month or more of the George Floyd uprising, there were often multiple protests happening on the same day at the same time. One march might intersect with another march. They were able to use geolocation and mapping to synthesize all that information and then determine the times and places where really egregious violations were made. They grouped those violations into four main categories: baton strikes, pepper spray, excessive force and improper arrest.

When the final settlement was announced, a lawyer for the City insisted that there was no historical pattern of police abuse of mass protests in New York.

This just makes me laugh. We saw similar misconduct during Occupy Wall Street when 700 protesters were kettled and arrested on the Brooklyn Bridge, or during the protests against the 2004 Republican National Convention when they illegally arrested hundreds of people and detained them for up to 72 hours in toxic holding pens at a West Side bus depot. They paid out $10 million in settlements for that. During the big Iraq War protests, they charged into terrified crowds on their horses. During the Critical Mass bike rides of the mid-2000s, I myself was run off the road by police officers in SUVs. Police attacks on First Amendment-protected protests have been a problem throughout my 25 years as an activist here in New York, and probably for longer than that.

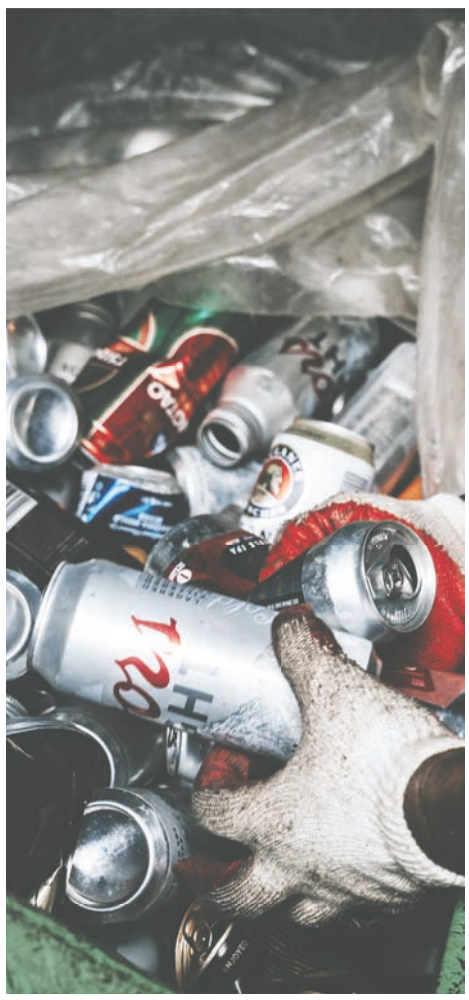
How many people will be eligible to receive money under this settlement?

We think there are at least 1,300 people who will qualify for this settlement. They are people who were arrested in certain places within certain windows of time and experienced some of this misconduct from the NYPD. It's an interesting moment to try and reach 1,300 people who were arrested during the George Floyd uprising, find them and say, "Hey, this is your money. Go get it. This will not endanger you. You don't have to give a Social Security number or interact with the police to do this." There's a lot of work to be done reaching out to those folks and trying to find people who have moved, or who didn't have an address at the time, or who might be afraid but really need that $10,000.

What's the path forward?

We should look to the same people, we've always looked to who really understand these issues: Black and Brown organizers who've been doing this work for hundreds of years, who understand resilience, who understand how smart you have to be to outwit this system, who understand care is justice and justice is care.

OLGA FEDOROVA



OLGA FEDOROVA

‘WE’RE CLEANING THE STREETS’

HARD-WORKING CANNERS TALK ABOUT THEIR HAUL AND WHAT KEEPS THEM GOING

FIVE CENTS AT A TIME: *The Sure We Can redemption center receives an average of 33,000 cans and bottles per day.*

STREET: *New York City has an estimated 10,000 canners.*

By Lydia Wei

On a hot summer day, the sound of clanging aluminum soda cans and Don Omar’s 2009 reggaeton hit “Salió El Sol” fills the sweltering air at Sure We Can, a non-profit outdoor redemption center in Williamsburg. Two-story tall edifices of boxed and bagged cans and bottles stretch toward the blue skies, towering over the people that sort. Large faces graffitied on the sides of industrial shipping containers peer out over endless stacks of cans that will soon be sent off for recycling. The canners themselves work in the shade of an overhead shelter. Though most of them are older immigrants, their hands move with an impressive dexterity as they sift through huge piles of cans, tossing them into bags divided by company and bottle type.

An estimated 10,000 canners — roughly the equivalent of the city’s Department of Sanitation workforce — make a living every day in the streets. Canning work takes on a variety of methods, and most people stick to a certain route. Canners interact with each other in many ways, from turf battles to building years-long friendships over the many hours spent sorting together. Some have cars and homes, while others rely on shopping carts to store and transport their collections.

In the outer boroughs, there are state-licensed redemption centers that buy cans and resell them to beverage companies. In Manhattan, for-profit pick-up trucks buy directly from canners on the street. Others exchange their cans through vending machines outside supermarkets, though these impose a $12-per-day limit and are often jammed.

In 1983, the New York State Returnable Container Act placed a five-cent deposit on cans for specific beverages, including carbonated soft drinks, water and beer. Since then, the deposit value hasn’t risen. In 2021, a bill was introduced in the state legislature that would raise the deposit value to 10 cents and increase the categories of containers covered, but it remains stalled.

Sure We Can is the only non-profit redemption center in Bushwick, Brooklyn. It was founded by canners Ana Martinez de Luco, a radical street nun, and Eugene Gadsden in 2007. It serves 1,200 individuals a year, distributing about $800,000 into the community annually, reports Sure We Can. A constant flow of canners visit the center to sort and deposit cans and bottles. We spoke with people there (excluding Linda) to get a sense of what it means to be New York City canner.

Interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

RENÉ

7 years canning; manager at Sure We Can

I was struggling with depression and an alcohol addiction, so I couldn’t work regularly anymore. There arrived a day when I didn’t have any work and didn’t have any money, and one of the only ways I could live was by canning.

I would sell everything on 33rd St. between 11th and 12th. We were next to a big parking lot; it was a very empty area. A pickup truck would come from Brooklyn. We were all there: Some people were homeless, some people had homes, but all of us were canners — all different people with different problems. There would be 40 to 50 of us at once. People had psychological problems, there were lots of fights, and in came the police, in came the ambulances. So the pickup spot no longer exists; now it’s NYPD parking.

My route was between Times Square and 49th St., 52nd, 48th, 60th, 42nd and 1st Ave., where there were lots of restaurants. Radio City had the most; you could get $200 or $300 in one night. You could find a six-wheeled USPS cart, and you fix it up, and 80 boxfulls of cans could fit on one of those push-carts. I was sometimes pushing three or four carts at the same time. It was really heavy, but you’re happy because it’s money.

When I stopped drinking, I started saving for an apartment. All the money I had been spending on alcohol started going to rent.

Sure We Can was born with me. Ana Martinez de Luco and I knew each other from the canning world. I was always a mechanic in my official jobs. Ana was initially working in Manhattan, and whenever she had a problem with a forklift or any mechanical problems, she would call me. Our alliance became stronger. Now I work as a manager here, and I deal with the transfer of cans to the companies that buy them.

FÉLITE

15 years canning; retired

People shouldn’t look at us with a bad eye, like we’re walking around begging — like what? We’re recycling! They look at us like we’re miserable. Those of us who you see in the street, we’re cleaning the streets!

I do it for my exercise. I walk around and make a little money. I worked in a supermarket and a meat shop, but I’ve been retired for about two years. In the afternoon, after getting out of work, I used to go out in the streets [to can]. I would go back home first, eat something, go out to the street around 3 p.m. and come back home by 7 p.m. But Saturday and Sunday, I spent almost completely in the street.

Now I’m old; I do it when I can.

GUILLERMA

7 years canning; retired

What we’re doing is good for the environment. It helps us to be able to buy necessities. I don’t work [anymore]. I get my little check each month but it’s not much, and it’s not enough.

MANY OF NYC’S 10,000 CANNERS ARE RETIREES

CARMEN ALVARES

12 years canning; retired; friends with Guillerma

I haven’t been employed for 15 years. That’s when I arrived here [from Venezuela], and I couldn’t get any work.

The supers give me bottles. I have three supers. I was around here and a guy said to me, “Hey, *morena*, do you collect bottles?” and I said, “Yes!” He said, “Go to this place on 86th, we’ll save bottles for you there,” and then I found two more supers, because they saw that I was working already at the one building, and the three buildings are right next to each other.

I don’t like the glass bottles. They’re very heavy. When I have ten boxes of glass bottles on this cart, I can’t. And you don’t make any more on them. Still five cents. They don’t want to raise the value. But I’m working more and making less.

It’s very heavy; it’s really bad for your body. But I don’t have anything else, [and] I’m not just gonna sit around. I have to do it. I have two sons. The money I gain with this is for the family. And I also send money to children with cancer, to help them. I sell these [cans, bottles] and I’ll send $10, $20 to the kids.

I worked through the whole pandemic. People told me, morena, morena, Don’t go into the street, but I went out and I never got sick.

Continued on page 18

LAURA JANE BRETT

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LAURA JANE BRETT

HOW THE TEAMSTERS PREVAILED OVER UPS

THE RETURN OF MILITANT UNION DEMOCRACY POWERS A HISTORIC CONTRACT CAMPAIGN

By Amba Guerguerian with John Tarleton

Early on in the morning of July 14, more than 300 UPS workers and their supporters had gathered outside the company's sprawling fulfillment center in Canarsie, Brooklyn for a rally and practice picket. At around 8 o'clock, a line of brown-uniformed employees walked directly from the line into work, dropping their signs reading "Just Practicing" right outside the facility's entrance.

Sean O'Brien, president of the Teamsters, which represents 340,000 UPS workers nationwide, was on hand to drive home the point that the union was fully ready to launch the largest private sector strike in decades when its contract with UPS expired on August 1. He had entered the building earlier that morning, dapping up workers and asking them, "We ready?" Meanwhile, managers in suits nervously filmed the strike preparation activities from the shade of the building's entrance.

"Maybe they feel pressure," said one worker as he observed a company official watching them.

"If they're doing that, it's because of something. Usually they don't care [when we practice picket]," said his friend.

"They're scared," concluded the worker.

"They're worried," affirmed his friend.

And with good reason. UPS Teamster practice pickets were held outside scores of UPS facilities across the country throughout during July. It was a flex that made visible the union's ability to mobilize its own members as well as a broader network of support. It also demonstrated how far the union had come since the members had voted out a management-friendly leadership in 2021. And more broadly it reflected the growing boldness of a resurgent labor movement that has seen a surge in strikes and union organizing from Hollywood actors and screenwriters to Amazon warehouse workers and Starbucks baristas and other essential workers.

• • •

Faced with a fully-mobilized union, UPS was the first to blink when it requested resumption of bargaining with the Teamsters on July 19, two weeks after the union had walked away from contract talks. Within hours of meeting on July 25, the two sides concluded a tentative contract agreement that left the union declaring it had won a historic victory. Among the gains were significant increases in starting wages for part-timer preloaders, the end of a two-tier wage system for drivers, the end to forced six-day work weeks, a commitment to install air conditioning in all new UPS vans starting in January and the removal of driver-facing surveillance cameras in the vans. The union projected the value of the settlement at $30 billion.

"I know for sure that if we could take $30 billion from a corporation, we kicked their ass," said Antonio Rosario, a UPS driver of 29 years and a Teamster organizer with Local 804 in New York City. "That's how we beat capital."

The UPS Teamsters will vote on the contract from August 3rd to 22nd.

• • •

The origins of the Teamsters' 2023 contract victory can be traced back over almost a half century — a history that includes exhilarating victories, crushing defeats and years of patiently organizing to reset the union on a democratic path that fully leverages the power of its rank-and-file membership to be able to force concessions from one of America's largest and most profitable corporations.

Under legendary Teamsters President Jimmy Hoffa Sr., who led the union from 1957 to 1971, the union achieved unprecedented gains for members that at that time predominantly worked in the trucking industry. However, Hoffa also made unsavory alliances with the mafia while purging the left from the union. By the 1970s the Teamsters were riddled with mob corruption. Hoffa spent four years in federal prison during his presidency. After his release, he was disappeared in 1975 in what is widely believed to have been a mafia hit.

In this milieu, rank-and-file caucus Teamsters for a Democratic Union was founded in Cleveland in 1976 following a wave of wildcat strikes that shook the freight industry. It was an alliance of socialists who had taken Teamster jobs and militant truck drivers who had been organizing against contract concessions.

TDU emphasized building union power from the bottom up. They did so by identifying and supporting worker-organizers and bringing them into struggles around workplace issues that most affected them.

In 1991, militant reformer Ron Carey won an upset victory two years after the Department of Justice required the union to give members the right to vote for their top officers. Carey — who supported the TDU but was not part of it — was the head of Local 804 in New York City, which to this day is one of the most militant Teamster locals. Carey was known for bolstering rank-and-file strategies and leading wildcat strikes in New York. In 1997, a year before he was ousted from power, 160,000 Teamsters went on a 15-day strike under his leadership, winning substantial pay increases and the conversion of 10,000 part-time positions to full-time. In an era when large strikes were rare and usually ended in defeat, the 1997 Teamster strike stood out as a beacon of hope for a moribund union movement.

The Teamsters' old guard returned to power in 1998 when Jimmy Hoffa Jr. became president, and the union's leadership soon reverted to negotiating management-friendly contracts behind closed doors. Facing a challenge from union dissidents, Hoffa narrowly won re-election in 2016. In 2018, he triggered a full-scale revolt within the union when he invoked an arcane union rule to impose a contract on the UPS Teamsters that the workers had voted down.

The blowback from the 2018 contract fiasco arrived three years later when Hoffa Jr. retired and his hand-picked successors lost by a nearly 2-1 margin to the Teamsters United reform slate led by Sean O'Brien. A longtime Boston Teamsters leader and a former Hoffa ally, O'Brien had previously clashed with TDU. Vowing there would be no more concessions to UPS, he ran in coalition with TDU and embraced their rank-and-file strategy to revitalize the union.

• • •

The new leadership formed organizing committees to unionize Amazon workers and to prepare UPS members for contract negotiations and the potential of a strike. The timing could not have been better.

The previous years had seen the first rumblings of a labor upsurge. In 2018 red state teacher unions in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona launched strikes over poor pay and working conditions that received broad public support, showing the power of collective action and solidarity even in seemingly inhospitable environments. During the pandemic, millions of workers quit their jobs in the "Great Resignation" while others responded to the callousness of their bosses by organizing unions including at workplaces like Amazon, Starbucks and Trader Joe's — long thought to be impossible to unionize.

At UPS workers received no hazard pay during the pandemic, even as the company's operating profits soared from $6.5 billion in 2019 to $13.1 billion in 2022, and investors were rewarded with billions of dollars in stock buybacks.

"We were getting all this information about how long the virus would sit on a package. We were like, 'Well, what happens if someone just touched it an hour ago, and they had COVID and I'm handling package now?" Local 804 organizer Antoine Andrews told *The Indypendent*. "We were out there. We were in the storm. Many of us lost loved ones. My mother passed away," Andrews said.

The contract campaign officially launched last August amid a flurry of activity set in motion by organizing committees. At union events, workers were given drafts of potential demands and invited to rank them. They were also invited to sign pledges that they would fight for a fair contract. New shop floor organizers were recruited and trained. Single-issue campaigns were launched around demands such as the installation of air conditioning inside UPS vans and making Martin Luther King Day a paid holiday. In July, practice pickets were held outside UPS workplaces across the country to put the company on notice while building support for a strike.

Local 804 worker-organizer and TDU member Elliot Lewis shared one of the organizing goals he set for himself with *The Indy:* "I'm trying to help develop other members of my center and see if they'll step up so that we could have, ideally, one contract-action-team member per 20 members or so."

"I think that sort of structure-based intensive organizing is what we've been building up nationally through the contract campaign, and what TDU has been building for a long time," Lewis added.

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Another centerpiece of this movement's success was highlighting the plight of part-timers. The current starting pay for part-timers, which make up 60% of the UPS workforce, is $15.50, just above minimum wage in many states. According to TDU, if part-timers' wages had risen with inflation since UPS instituted a two-tier wage scale in 1982, their starting pay would be over $25 an hour.

"When I was a part-timer in the 1990s, the top guys would load three or four trucks, but now they have them loading five or six," says Rosario.

"Sometimes they infuse certain unscrupulous little tricks, like speeding up the conveyor belt," adds longtime part-timer Lennox James, who sells plants and Caribbean food in his spare time, and took the job at UPS to be able to provide benefits to his family. He wants to corral more young part-timers to participate in organizing. "It needs to be cool to be involved and active [in the union]!"

"We are the forgotten Teamsters," says James, who was hired as a part-timer in 2008 at $9.50 hourly, the same wage Rosario started at in 1994. Contract givebacks under Hoffa Jr. fell hardest on the backs of part-timers. This resulted not only in tension among workers on the shop floor, but problems within the union, where the part-timers felt they'd been abandoned in previous contracts. To promote full- and part-timer unity, Rosario started putting together building-wide parties and events in 2017, something he had never done before.

In addition to building unity within their ranks, the Teamsters welcomed the support of outside allies. Here in New York, that included community organizations like Make the Road New York and the Alliance for a Greater New York, and socialist organizations like the Party for Socialism and Liberation and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

In 2022, DSA members voted nationally to launch a Union Power campaign to support the growing labor movement. Over this past winter, the Strike Ready campaign was launched to strengthen UPS mobilization. In a case of history repeating itself, DSA members have taken jobs at UPS to strengthen long-term rank-and-file organizing. With a possible strike approaching, other DSA members undertook neighborhood-level canvassing to build public support for the UPS workers in the contract fight and encourage people to attend UPS rallies and practice pickets.

"It's been super exciting," says DSA member Rebeccah Hoffmann. "I think everybody is learning a lot. I didn't come from somewhere where socialism was talked about, and I definitely didn't come from a place where labor was really talked about, especially in this way."

Young socialists have also been getting other union jobs — as teachers, nurses, auto workers, city employees — in order to promote militant, democratic unionism within established unions.

When asked what he thinks of socialists getting involved in the UPS struggle, Lennox said, "I'm okay with it. I think that we gotta be realistic. Capitalism has gone on steroids, so there must be some sort of checks and balances." (I posed this question to a handful of other workers, and they echoed the same sentiment.)

THE ORIGINS OF THE TEAMSTERS' CONTRACT VICTORY CAN BE TRACED BACK OVER ALMOST A HALF CENTURY

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After contract talks between UPS and the Teamsters stalled on July 5 over a disagreement about pay increases for part-timers, the union pummeled the company in the media while practice pickets grew in size and numbers across the country.

At a practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn, burly Teamsters chanted "Who got the power?/ What kind of power?" while loudspeakers blasted "We're Not Gonna Take It" and "Under Pressure" as other workers drove by, honking in solidarity.

"This is just a little snippet of what can happen if UPS doesn't come to their senses and do the right thing by our members," Teamsters President Sean O'Brien told *The Indy* outside the July 7 practice picket in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

With the prospects of a strike rising, union militants and their external supporters looked forward to August 1 with growing anticipation. It was going to be the Super Bowl of struggles between capital and labor, and for once the workers appeared to hold the upper hand. The Teamsters had brought UPS to its knees in its 15 day-strike in 1997. This time, the union was better organized, had cultivated far more external allies, and would be taking action at a time when public support for unions is at its highest point since the mid-1960s. The company also knew a prolonged strike could send customers fleeing to rivals such as FedEx and Amazon, and that they might not come back.

DSA's enthusiasm for a strike was matched by growing alarm in corporate America. With the growth of e-commerce, UPS' central role in the economy had increased by leaps and bounds since 1997. Its workers handle a quarter of all ground shipments in the United States and an estimated five to six percent of the U.S. gross domestic product annually. A strike would have paralyzed UPS while creating cascading disruptions throughout the economy. On July 20, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce urged the Biden Administration to intervene in case of a strike and force workers to return to their jobs under a provision in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act that allows the president to do so "in instances in which a strike might endanger the public's health or safety."

Taft-Hartley was last invoked by a president to thwart work stoppages in 2002 and 1971 — in both cases against the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, which represents West Coast dock workers.

President Biden expressed support for the Teamsters right to strike in his public statements. However, his decision in December to use the 1926 Railway Labor Act to break a potential railroad workers strike and impose a management-friendly settlement on 12 railroad workers' unions loomed in the background.

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While the tentative contract agreement contains many gains for the Teamsters, for some a sense of a missed opportunity lingers. A strike, after all, might have yielded even bigger gains for UPS workers. And a nationwide showdown with UPS offered a rare opportunity in the annals of American labor.

"UPS workers know what they've won as a result of their threat. But how many Amazon workers are aware of this?" Asked David Levin of TDU. "Had there been a strike, it would have been a national teach-in about the reality of worker power and union power."

Speaking at a July 31 Strike Power Town Hall organized by NYC-DSA, Elliot Lewis reflected the mixed emotions many of the 150 attendees felt about the contract campaign's outcome.

"Is it disappointing after organizing for a strike for years to not strike when I think we could have won more? Yeah, it's disappointing," Lewis said. "But is it also rewarding to see that we've overturned decades of concessions? Yes."

For Antonio Rosario, the outcome was good enough. "This will probably be the first time that I ever vote Yes on a contract, because we won so much," he said at the same town hall. "We have to realize that the reason we're here is because it took hundreds of thousands of workers mobilizing," but, "we as workers should we ever really be satisfied with what we get? No! This is just the beginning. This is where we start."

For labor historian Toni Gilpin, winning a strong contract without having to go on strike is a sign of strength. "You want unions that are strong enough to compel management to give up the goods without actually having to go through the hardship of the strike," she told *The Indy*.

Continued on page 16

REVVED UP: *Teamster Local 804 members hold a practice picket outside a UPS fulfillment center in Canarsie, Brooklyn.*

CORPORATE PIGS: *UPS Teamsters brought a mascot to their practice pickets. The company's annual profits increased from $6.5 billion in 2019 to $13.1 billion in 2022.*

WAIT & SEE: *The prospect of 340,000 Teamsters going on strike nationwide loomed large for much of July.*

THEO STURZ

DETERMINED: *Members of the Screen Actors Guild walk the picket line outside Disney Studios in Burbank, California.*

HOLLYWOOD IS A UNION TOWN

BUT THE HISTORY OF TODAY'S STRIKING UNIONS IS COMPLICATED

By Steven Wishnia

The American movie industry has been one of the most consistently unionized sectors of the economy since the 1930s — but to achieve that, workers had to overcome "the iron fist of the moguls" and organized crime, says historian Gerald Horne, author of *Class Struggle in Hollywood 1930-1950*.

Craft workers — painters, plumbers, carpenters — were the first to organize, joining the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE), founded in New York in 1893. Five hundred of them went on strike in 1918. The Screen Writers Guild, ancestor of the Writers Guild of America, was founded at a meeting of 10 writers in February 1933, and the Screen Actors Guild, a few months later. (SAG merged with the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists to form SAG-AFTRA in 2012.) Teamsters Local 399, which now represents drivers, casting directors and more, emerged in the early 1930s.

Hollywood's moguls and the Depression's brutal economy gave workers a motive to organize: In March 1933, the main movie studios announced a 50% pay cut. The unions also benefited from a core of leftist militants, such as John Howard Lawson, the Screen Writers Guild's first president and a Communist Party member who Horne calls "the spark."

The Guild was elected bargaining agent for screenwriters in 1938, under the protections established by the new National Labor Relations Act. It did not win a full contract with the studios until 1941, though.

SAG's impetus was money and safety. Their salaries had already been slashed in 1931, and Frankenstein star Boris Karloff complained about having to do a 25-hour shoot. By the end of the year, it had attracted stars like James Cagney and Groucho Marx, and membership reached 5,000 in 1935. It won its first contract in 1937. The American Federation of Radio Artists, AFTRA's predecessor, formed that year and won its first contract in 1938.

IATSE already had a foothold in the film industry, with 9,000 members by 1933. But in 1934, it was taken over by organized crime, which installed George E. Browne as president. Browne and his partner, gangster Willie Bioff, worked out low-wage deals with the studio owners in exchange for bribes. They made several unsuccessful attempts to take over SAG, took a 2% kickback on paychecks and sent goons to break up a 1937 strike protesting such, and split up a local that rebelled against mob control.

The arrangement continued after Bioff and Browne were imprisoned on federal racketeering charges in 1941, with Roy Brewer heading the Hollywood locals.

A rival federation, the Conference of Studio Unions, attracted craft workers trying to get out from under that mob domination. Affiliated with the national Carpenters union, it also included painters and cartoonists and was headed by Herb Sorrell, a veteran of the failed 1937 strike.

The CSU's numerous jurisdictional disputes with IATSE over who had the right to do which jobs came to a head in March 1945. Set decorators who had broken away from IATSE affiliated with CSU Local 1421. The studios refused to bargain with them, leading to a strike by more than 10,000 CSU members.

The strike slowed but didn't halt film production. Thousands of IATSE members refused to cross the picket lines, according to Local 728's website. But SAG members did, including a rising union official named Ronald Reagan.

Frustrated, CSU decided to try to stop production at the Warner Brothers lot in Burbank with mass picketing. On Oct. 5, several hundred picketers assembled outside the lot — they were assaulted by strikebreakers and mob goons on one side, and by Los Angeles County police with tear-gas bombs on the other.

The strike was settled later that month, but the studios blacklisted IATSE members who had refused to cross picket lines, and permanently locked out the CSU the next year.

By then, the mogul-Mob alliance had a powerful new weapon against the unions: Anti-Communist hysteria was spreading rabidly across the country, and anyone with a leftist history was a target. Reagan, then beginning his devolution from a liberal to a far-right icon and soon to become SAG president, accused the CSU of being part of a "Soviet effort to gain control of Hollywood." In reality, the Communist Party had opposed the 1945 strike.

In October 1947, the House Un-American Activities Committee held hearings on "Communist infiltration" of Hollywood, featuring "friendly witnesses" like Reagan and Ayn Rand. The committee vituperatively grilled the ten "unfriendly witnesses" about their political associations. Two of them, John Howard Lawson and Lester Cole, both among Writers' Guild's 10 founders, were imprisoned for contempt of Congress after they refused to answer questions. They and a third Guild cofounder, John Bright, were among the hundreds of people blacklisted from working in the industry until the 1960s.

The federal Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 required union officials to swear that they were not Communists, and most unions quickly went along. SAG in 1953 voted almost unanimously to impose a similar loyalty oath on new members.

Union density in Hollywood stayed near-universal, however. Most American employers in the 1950s didn't have a problem with unions that had tamed themselves by purging the left. Density was around 90% in 1979, according to the Strikewave newsletter, but plummeted to less than half in the Reagan 1980s.

Meanwhile, the industry's economics were upended in 1948 by the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.*, which prohibited studios from owning movie theaters. That led to the end of the studio system, in which most workers were hired as employees under long-term contracts, and effectively made them freelancers. It coincided with the rise of television, making residuals — payments for reuse of their work, such as movies broadcast on TV or TV show reruns — an important source of income.

"Every industry-wide strike since 1950 has been about residuals," *Below the Stars* author Kate Fortmueller wrote in the *L.A. Review of Books* in May.

The unions finally won residuals in 1960, after overlapping strikes by the Writers' Guild and SAG. The Writers' Guild has gone on strike eight times since 1950, including a four-month walkout in 1973 that won residuals for video sales and cable TV. SAG-AFTRA's longest was an 11-month strike by video-game actors in 2016. The abysmal residuals for streaming are a main issue in the current strike.

Hollywood unions today, Horne says, "don't have to face the tidal wave of red-baiting that they did in 1945 and 1946." He hasn't seen current SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher accused of being a closet Communist, he notes.

On the other hand, he adds, "they could use the kind of selflessness and energy that the Communists injected."

JILL CONNELLY

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: *SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher on the picket line in Los Angeles.*

CREATIVE CLASS ON STRIKE

By John Tarleton

Shortly before television and movie actors went on strike on July 14, SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher spoke at a press conference about why her union was headed for the picket lines. Her voice trembling with barely contained rage, the former star of the hit '90s sitcom *The Nanny* didn't waste a word.

Drescher called on her union's 160,000 members to make the collective sacrifices necessary to win a prolonged strike against some of this nation's wealthiest corporations — Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Disney, Paramount, etc. She also appealed for the support of the broader labor movement and the public at large to support the union. In this strike, the workers are not only fighting for better pay and working conditions but for the possibility that workers in all fields affected by will be able to exert any control over how artificial intelligence (AI) is deployed and to whose benefit.

Drescher's short soliloquy went viral and received millions of views. You can find a video of her speech online at https://rb.gy/bv2fp. It's worth a look. In a world where public figures are often content to communicate in bland talking points, Drescher's short speech was a master class in how to speak simultaneously to multiple constituencies with rhetoric that explains and galvanizes at the same time.

Drescher's speech came on the heels of a story from *Deadline* about corporate CEOs from the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers' (AMPTP) plan to crush strikes by the actors and the screenwriters (who have been on the picket line since May 2) by starving them out until they start losing their homes and apartments. The stark nature of Hollywood's class war couldn't have been made clearer. Most of SAG-AFTRA's members are not rich and famous. But some of them are, and they have millions of fans who they can communicate directly with through social media as they fight for the future of their craft. Unfortunately for the studio bosses, who know more about manipulating spreadsheets than how to command a stage, they are up against a union whose members, by definition, are some of the world's most talented communicators. We'll see how this plays out in the months ahead.

'If we don't stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble.'

"What happens here is important because what's happening to us is happening across all fields of labor, by means of when employers make Wall Street and greed their priority and they forget about the essential contributors that make the machine run. We are the victims here. We are being victimized by a very greedy entity. I am shocked by the way the people we have been in business with are treating us. I cannot believe it, quite frankly, how far apart we are on so many things. How they plead poverty. That they're losing money left and right when giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs. The entire business model has been changed by streaming, digital, AI. This is a moment of history, that is a moment of truth. If we don't stand tall right now, we are all going to be in trouble. We are all going to be in jeopardy, being replaced by machines. You cannot change the business model as much as it has changed and not expect the contract to change too. We're not going to keep doing incremental changes on a contract that no longer honors what is happening right now with this business model that was foisted upon us. What are we doing? Moving around furniture on the Titanic? It's crazy. So the jig is up AMPTP. We stand tall. You have to wake up and smell the coffee. We are labor and we stand tall and we demand respect and to be honored for our contribution. You share the wealth because you cannot exist without us! Thank you."

— FRAN DRESCHER
President of SAG-AFTRA

NINA BERMAN

ALU RIFT: *Amazon Labor Union President Chris Smalls (third from left) speaks at a 2022 Labor Day rally. A reform caucus within ALU is demanding the union hold democratic elections for its leadership.*

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

GRINDR WORKERS SWIPE FOR UNION

Workers at the LGBTQ+ dating app Grindr announced July 20 that they want a long-term relationship with the Communications Workers of America union. Union supporters say they've signed up a large majority of about 100 employees in tech, design, marketing and quality assurance. "We want a company built for queer people, not one built to extract wealth from queer people," they said in a letter to management. "And we want to build it together, united." The union also noted the roughly 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in Congress and state legislatures this year. "Grindr employees believe it is crucial to stand united & push back against these assaults on equality & inclusivity by joining together to exercise their power at work," it said on Twitter July 20. The 14-year-old app, which lets users click on the profiles of other users in their vicinity, has about 13 million active users a month.

AMAZON UNION DISSIDENTS SUE FOR ELECTION

A dissident group of 86 workers at Amazon's JFK8 warehouse on Staten Island sued the Amazon Labor Union in federal court in Brooklyn July 10, demanding that it hold elections for union leadership. The ALU leadership changed the union's constitution last December to postpone elections for new officers until after it wins a contract. Amazon has refused to recognize or negotiate with the union for more than a year. ALU Democratic Reform Caucus member David-Desyrée Sherwood told *Labor Notes* that union leader Chris Smalls had presented the revised constitution at a meeting without allowing a vote by members, telling them, "If you don't like it, there's the door." ALU co-founder Gerald Bryson dismissed the reform caucus as an attempted "coup" by "seven white people." Meanwhile in Pontiac, Michigan, 60 warehouse workers at Amazon's delivery station interrupted the Prime Day sales rush July 11-12 with a three-hour walkout. "We are demanding a safe work environment where we are not straining, pulling muscles from lifting heavy packages, or tripping over boxes falling off the conveyor belt," said striker Alicia Ozier.

HOUSE GOP SEEKS TO SLASH LABOR-LAW ENFORCEMENT

A House appropriations subcommittee voted July 14 to approve massive cuts to labor-law enforcement contained in the Republicans' budget proposal for the 2024 fiscal year. It would slash funding for the Wage and Hour Division by $75 million, a 29% cut from this year; slice $95 million from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a 15% cut; and amputate one-third of the National Labor Relations Board's budget — bringing it down to $200 million, the lowest since 1998. President Biden had sought $376.4 million for the NLRB, which oversees labor-management relations and got $299 million last year, the agency's first raise since 2014. It has been swamped with a 53% increase in petitions for union-representation elections and hundreds of Unfair Labor Practice charges filed against Starbucks alone. "We are not even close to replacing the 50% of field staff that have left the agency since 2002," the NLRB Union said July 14.

BARBONCINO BECOMES CITY'S FIRST UNIONIZED PIZZERIA

Workers at the Barboncino pizzeria in Crown Heights voted unanimously to join Barboncino Workers United on July 26, making it the first unionized pizzeria in New York City. The union, affiliated with Workers United SEIU, will represent about 40 line cooks, bartenders, bussers and servers. The staff, the union said, wanted better wages, more control over scheduling, clear disciplinary procedures, and a "no tolerance" sexual-harassment policy. They had asked management to recognize the union voluntarily last November, but it didn't, so they petitioned the National Labor Relations Board to schedule the vote. "I'm proud to be part of the fight to bring order and justice to the nation's fastest-growing, least-protected industry," bartender Mike Kemmett said in a statement.

LAURA JANE BRETT

RIKERS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AXED

OUTSIDE GROUPS BANISHED FROM CITY JAIL AFTER 30 YEARS OF HELPING INMATES RE-ENTER SOCIETY

By Amba Guerguerian

"We were very clear to all of our agencies — no cuts in services which are important. No layoffs. That was very clear directions," Mayor Eric Adams said at a press conference after his initial budget presentation in January.

So why, then, did the $107 billion austerity budget deal announced June 29 eliminate daily programming at Rikers Island — which advocates and lawmakers say successfully reduces recidivism and the likelihood of violent incidents inside jails? The programming, which costs $17 million annually, was the only component cut from the Department of Correction's $1.2 billion budget.

People detained on Rikers who have been participating in these classes and services will no longer have a bright spot to look forward to each day while being held in pre-trial detention. Half of the program's workers will have to find new jobs. And people released from Rikers will re-enter society with less support and fewer new skills that to chart a positive path.

Adams ordered almost all City agencies to cut their budgets for the 2024 fiscal year (FY24), which began July 1. It was the third and largest round of cuts he has demanded since taking office in January 2022.

The New York Police Department, however, has faced no cuts, and police officers won significant pay raises in April. Critics of austerity also cite that the administration allocated $8.3 billion to reserves, the highest amount ever set aside in the city budget, while revenue continues to come in higher than expected each month.

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The Fortune Society is one of the five community-based groups that were contracted by the Department of Correction (DOC) to lead the daily programming on Rikers Island. Its Prepare for Release program, also known as Individualized Corrections Achievement Network (I-CAN), provides skill-building workshops and discharge-preparation services for individuals during incarceration and further services post-release.

Alex (a pseudonym), who was released from Rikers in May, told *The Indypendent* that "just interacting with the other inmates that also had a purpose of changing their lives" was the most beneficial part of the programming. "It was a rewarding experience because we learned a lot," he added. "Being incarcerated is rough as it is, but the time went by kinda quick with the Fortune Society."

The I-CAN program started in 2005, but it and other groups with a similar mission (most recently, the Osborne Association, SCO Family of Services, Greenhope Services for Women and Fedcap Rehabilitation Services) had been running programming in city jails since Mayor David Dinkins initiated it in the early 1990s.

On Rikers Island, the programming served around 1,700 participants out of an incarcerated population of around 6,000, according to the Fortune Society. Participation was voluntary.

These organizations offered group sessions each day for over an hour in the common areas of the penal colony's housing units. Incarcerated people voluntarily chose to participate in work-training programs (certifications in construction and food preparation), educational classes, stress- and anger-management programs, wellness programs, parenting classes, financial literacy lessons, entrepreneurship classes, life-skills classes, addiction programming, and trauma-informed group therapy. (The Horticulture Society had its own contract with the DOC to offer gardening classes, and that has also been eliminated.)

"In addition to group services, we give them certificates that they can take to the judge, to the district attorney and to their lawyers, and say, 'I'm engaged in something constructive while I'm inside,'" said Dr. Ronald Day, vice president of programs and research at the Fortune Society. "We are reducing violence and then increasing the chances that people can be successful when they get out."

All classes and services were upended as of July 3. One effect is that inmates will no longer have the opportunity to show their families they're being active in jail, points out Jamel Ealey, who has worked at the Fortune Society since 2021. "You know, man, we have our appreciation days, and we pass out our certifications, and that father is walking up to that podium — you should see the smile in the kid's eyes, like the level of accomplishment — man," said Ealey over the phone, his voice cracking. "The trickle-down effect of [the cuts] is massive. We're not just talking about the people that are currently incarcerated. We're talking about the families that are never gonna be incarcerated, but are incarcerated because their loved one is."

Many participants continue with the Fortune Society' reentry programs once they're out. The organization, for example, helped Alex find housing upon his release from Rikers. He lives in a room with five other men in a transitional home. It's not ideal, but the conditions there are better than those in the City's homeless shelters, where many people end up after being released from jail. Alex doesn't have the support of family, so Fortune is who he was in touch with before his release; the organization picked him up and took him to his new room.

Alex is now participating in Fortune's program for the recently released as well as working four days a week through the Association for Community Employment Programs, doing maintenance work and street cleaning around the boroughs. "I like it a lot; it keeps me busy," he says.

"So far, so good. I am with the Fortune Society," responded Alex when asked how things were going on the outside.

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Earlier this year, the mayor asked the Department of Correction to trim its budget. It's unclear whether it was asked to make the 3-4% cuts required of nearly all other agencies — but the department, run by Commissioner Louis Molina, decided to axe a mere 1.4% of its budget, and in one place only: services run by outside organizations.

"They could have found other ways to get the funding cut," says David Rodriguez, Fortune Society's operational supervisor in community services. "They didn't have to do this. You're taking services away from folks who really don't have a voice."

Dr. Day says there were many other ways to trim $17 million from the DOC budget: "So you mean to tell me that, with the [job] vacancies that you have, and with the people that are not reporting to work, you're going to cut the budget of people who have been consistently coming into the facilities?" he asks.

It costs around $500,000 to keep one person incarcerated for a year on Rikers Island, where the ratio of correction officers to inmates, more than one-to-one, is the highest of any jail nationwide. Yet the jail complexes' conditions are also some of the worst in the country. The discrepancies here could be in part due to the fact that officers, represented by the Correctional Officers' Benevolent Association (COBA) union, have a provision in their contract dating back to the 1970s that allows them to take unlimited sick days.

There have been few consequences for those who abuse the system, a *New York Times* investigation revealed last year. When former DOC Commissioner Vincent Schiraldi, a reformer appointed by previous mayor Bill de Blasio, tried to tighten the rules around sick pay, he was met by fierce protests from COBA members, who had been calling out of work en masse during the COVID pandemic. Commissioner Molina, appointed by Adams at the behest of COBA, reloosened the rules shortly after his tenure began in January 2022. On one Tuesday in January 2022, around 2,600 of the DOC's 7,800 uniformed personnel were out sick, according to the department.

The DOC could also save money by working to diminish abuse by its correction officers. Based on the number of claimants so far, the Comptroller's Office included $157 million in the department's FY24 budget for the costs of settling class-action lawsuits against it for mistreatment of incarcerated people.

"The collateral consequence of eliminating programs from the DOC budget further insulates and isolates the DOC operations. Not having community-based partners coming to the jail, working in the housing areas and being in the facilities is another step toward retrenching and isolating what happens in the facilities," Fortune Society deputy CEO Stanley Richards told *The Indy*. The city Board of Correction, which has full authority to oversee DOC under the City Charter, has had its access to Rikers' camera system restricted by the department, he added — "another collateral consequence of a department that's moving in the wrong direction."

"Removing our organizations from the department takes additional eyes and ears out of the facility. That's very consistent with what the commissioner has been doing, which is not reporting incidents in the jail," said Day.

The programming, seen as a sensible way to keep incarcerated people occupied and out of trouble, had survived under eight previous DOC commissioners.

Amid the continued chaos and violence at Rikers, the lead federal prosecutor in Manhattan plans to request that a court-appointed receiver take over the city's Rikers Island jail complex. "After eight years of trying every tool in the toolkit, we cannot wait any longer for substantial progress to materialize," U.S. Attorney Damian Williams said in a statement July 17. The federal monitor named in 2015 to settle a civil-rights suit issued a report in July saying that the DOC had failed to address "pervasive dysfunction and harm."

"There has to be an appreciation for the level of stabilization we were able to do in the last 19 months," Commissioner Molina responded July 25. In those 19 months, 26 Rikers inmates have died, including four in July — two of unknown causes, one of cancer, and one of a possible drug overdose. Federal Judge Laura Taylor Swain will hold a hearing on receivership Aug. 10.

Additionally, a spokesperson for the office of City Councilmember Carlina Rivera, the chair of the council's Committee on Criminal Justice, told *The Indy* that the committee is looking into legislative pathways to mandate DOC provide the services that were covered by the $17 million that was cut.

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The Fortune Society's programming was focused at the Anna M. Kross Center — the largest jail on Rikers, with a capacity of up to nearly 3,000 beds — and on The Boat. Under de Blasio, services weren't offered in the housing units, but in the chapel, gymnasium or in a classroom. "But over the last couple of years, things have gotten more intense in the facilities with respect to violence and gang issues, etc.," says Day, so services are now delivered in the housing units and last just over an hour, compared to three hours previously.

Ealey, who worked on The Boat and, along with his co-workers, facilitated his last session June 30, said that before he arrived, the participants have often already set up tables for the group to use. "They actually look forward to [doing that]. They'll actually be there before we get there a majority of the time. You know, it's a break in their monotony," he said.

Like Rodriguez, Day and Richards, Ealey participated in the programming himself while he was incarcerated. He was inspired by seeing Day come into his unit when he was locked up at the Manhattan Detention Center, and sought out the Fortune Society the day after he was released in August 2021. He was hired shortly thereafter.

The ability of Fortune Society staffers who had done time to relate to inmates was an integral part of the program's success, say both its participants and leaders. It made it easier for incarcerated people to open up about their experiences, former participants attested to during conversations with *The Indy*.

"They used to bend out; they used to cry; they used to want to talk one-on-one with someone," Rodriguez says.

DOC officials say the services are now being provided by its staff, which critics find very dubious. The staff to take on program facilitation are represented by the municipal workers' union DC 37, not COBA, and such duties are not written into their contract. That means there is little incentive for them to take on the extra work, particularly because most staff avoid spending extended amounts of time in the housing units.

"In order to deliver the services at quality levels, you have to have the trust of the people who are incarcerated," says Day, but there is a deep mistrust between inmates and DOC employees at Rikers.

"I think Corrections is struggling to do the job that we are asking them to do right now," said Public Advocate Jumaane Williams at a rally outside City Hall on June 22. "There's a lot of issues there. Let's focus on that. Don't take a whole other thing that you have to put onto your plate right now."

Rikers has been in shambles for decades, but since COVID-19, the conditions have gotten even worse. "The food is terrible; the conditions are just terrible. It's basically run by gangs, man," Alex told *The Indy*. "It's sad because it's supposed to be 'Care, Custody and Control,' but it's out of control, there's no care, and the custody is trash. There's no recourse for Rikers Island," he said. "They even cut out some of the religious services; you can't even have Bibles anymore."

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You shouldn't balance the budgets on the backs of people who are in desperate need of services," says Day.

"I think it's wrong, because they don't care about inmates," Alex adds. "We're just a paycheck. We're just people to be housed as cattle. They don't give a fuck about us."

He also thinks that services shouldn't be stopped, but bolstered: "They should have more programs, like help people get housing [upon release]. Everybody knows these [city] shelters are worse than prison. I'm tired of living in three-quarter houses and shelters and halfway houses. They should have something in place for when guys come out, instead of being in an atmosphere where people are stealing, people are fighting, people are getting cut, getting beat up."

In marginalized communities, institutionalization begins long before jail, says Ealey. "You don't just wake up and go to Rikers. They sought you out with group homes and the Division of Youth, and they put you in all of these institutions to already institutionalize you. So by the time you reach there, you just fall right into line."

"It's horrendous when you really delve into the socio-economic side of things," he adds. "A certain number of people gotta be incarcerated just to make the system work."

The Fortune Society's budget allowed for the rehiring of only half of the Rikers program's roughly 20 staffers. The others are out of work — and it's not so easy for the formerly incarcerated to find jobs. The news has left Day reeling.

"I never felt more appreciative of working with a particular team," he said. When he initially told workers the programming was likely to be cut, "We had maybe 20 people in the room. And every single one of them talked about how devastated they were — not that they might be out of a job, but that the participants that they serve on a daily basis would be like, 'What, you're not going to be here anymore?'"

Fortune says it's exerting pressure on the City to restore the funding. "We feel that there is a moral imperative to be critical of the department, to speak out against an organization even if it funds you," Day told *The Indy*.

All people interviewed for this article said they can't wait to see the day Rikers (and its violent culture) are finally shuttered.

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The Fortune Society's Long Island City center serves about 400 people daily. On a morning in mid-July, visitors, who are mostly men, pass through the halls, going to and from classrooms. Flyers hang around advertising creative arts programming, acting classes, a "women rising" program and a "fair chance for housing" community meeting.

I sit at a table with Day, Rodriguez and Ealey in a common area, murals lining the walls. "We have connections with people that work in the facilities," Day says, "and they have told us, there's no way *on this planet* that they are going to be able to do what we were doing."

THERE BUT FOR FORTUNE: *(left to right) David Rodriguez, Stanley Richards, Ronald Day and Jamel Ealey of the Fortune Society. Led by formerly incarcerated people, the organization has conducted educational programs at Rikers Island since the early 1990s.*

OWEN SCHACHT

OWEN SCHACHT

‘IT’S HOME’

NYCHA RESIDENTS IN CHELSEA RESIST DEMOLITION PLAN THAT COULD DISPLACE THEM

By Elsie Carson-Holt

Jackie Lara describes coming to the Fulton Houses as “her best Christmas present.” She and her children moved out of a shelter into Fulton Houses, a public-housing development in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood, just after New Years Eve in 2002.

“My application [for public housing] came in after a year and a half of being in the shelter,” Lara says. “And I remember when they called me to come and see this apartment. I planted my seed here. This is my home.”

Celines Mirandas is of the same mind. Her family has lived in the Chelsea-Elliott complex, about half a mile away, since 1975. “My mother is at an age where she gets disoriented a lot. And she doesn’t know which direction to go … but when she’s in her neighborhood, she knows where she’s at. She knows it’s our home.”

Lara and Mirandas, along with the about 4,500 other tenants who live in the Fulton and Chelsea-Elliott Houses, have witnessed the rapid gentrification of their neighborhood over the past two decades. The tenants are now experiencing an even larger change: the recent announcement by New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) that their buildings will be demolished and rebuilt by The Related Companies and Essence Realty. The mega-project would bring in 2,500 market-rate apartments plus commercial spaces, and the first time mixed-income buildings would be built on NYCHA land.

ORIGINS OF A PLAN

In 2019, NYCHA initiated plans to privatize and demolish the Fulton Houses. The de Blasio administration began working with private developers to raze and rebuild two of the smallest buildings at Fulton Houses, using the program Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which leases NYCHA land to private developers who would make 70% of the new apartments market rate, and 30% affordable housing. The money would allegedly then be used to finance repairs for the rest of Fulton Houses.

That plan, however, was opposed by tenants, who rejected the proposal to tear down two buildings, and instead chose private managers to oversee the renovation. Lara was in the working group of 15 tenants that in 2019 decided against the demolition plan, and has been fighting to stop the demolition ever since. She explained that “as soon as I found out about the demolition [in 2019] I started just looking for people that would help me protest. ... And we stopped the demolition for 2019. We went to Community Board 4. We protested.”

As she walks through Chelsea, Mirandas points out the different buildings bordering the NYCHA developments owned by The Related Companies, one of the biggest developers in New York City. Related was also the driving force behind the nearby Hudson Yards luxury development, which opened in 2019 and has received nearly $6 billion in tax breaks and government assistance. The Hudson Yards buildings still sit half-empty.

In early 2023, Related and Essence announced their demolition plans. In a survey distributed in the spring, NYCHA offered residents three options for the future of their homes: new construction with rezoning, new construction without rezoning, or rehabilitation of existing units. The survey did not mention demolition, only new construction, and did not mention the construction of market-rate units on NYCHA land. It also omitted information about temporary relocation. It has been criticized by the Legal Aid Society and Community Services Society, who oppose the demolition on the grounds that it may cause displacement and disagree with the claims that the process has been resident-led.

“We’ve spoken to residents who never saw the survey. The presentation that the survey was based on was misleading.” Alex MaxDougall, a lawyer for Legal Aid Society told *The Indypendent*. “It didn’t say anything about demolition, didn’t say anything about temporary relocation. It didn’t say anything about the development of 2,500 market-rate apartments.”

MacDougall also pointed out that “Related could never have this land without a public-housing deal. And they’ve been circling this area for a long time.”

According to the anti-demolition group Save Section 9, only 30% of households voted at all in the survey. Among the 30%, 60% voted for “new construction with rezoning for taller buildings in less time.”

When *The Indy* asked Fulton Houses Tenant Association President Miguel Acevedos about the low turnout, he responded that “the voter turnout on the last mayoral election was 20%. The voter turnout in the last primary that took place in June was 4%. So voting is a problem nationwide.”

A SWIFTLY CHANGING NEIGHBORHOOD

Starting with an influx of Irish immigrants in the mid-19th century, the west end of Chelsea became an industrial zone, with piers jutting into the

Hudson River, warehouses and factories, as well as lumberyards, breweries and tenements to house the workers. The east end of Chelsea became a center of American theater. It was also home to the early motion picture industry and to Tin Pan Alley, where much of the popular music of the 1910s and '20s was produced. It was a far cry from the expensive retail stores, upscale restaurants and tourist draws like the Highline and Chelsea Market that the area is known for now.

George Weaver, who has lived in Fulton House since 1993, has seen Chelsea's transformation first hand. "We used to have a lot of mom-and-pop stores in the neighborhood," he said. "They're no longer in existence."

He feels as if he is "absolutely being priced out" of Chelsea, something Lara agrees with. "Chelsea has made it clear they absolutely don't want us here," she said.

Weaver, who has a degree in business administration and is pursuing a second degree in public administration, feels like the NYCHA houses are mischaracterized. "A misnomer is that tenants here are not upwardly mobile. A lot of them are college educated. … Some of them are teachers. Some of them are social workers. They live here. And they've grown up here. And so why should they have to go anywhere else?"

The Fulton and Chelsea-Elliott demolition would only be the third public housing teardown in NYCHA history. Every anti-demolition tenant and housing advocate *The Indy* spoke to cited fear of displacement as their primary concern regarding the Chelsea-Elliott and Fulton tear downs. Their fears are not unfounded.

When NYCHA tore down Prospect Plaza, a public-housing project in Brooklyn in the early 2000s, more than 1,000 families were displaced. The same is true for Cabrini Green in Chicago, where more than 80% of public-housing residents never returned after its demolition. In New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the City moved to demolish its remaining public housing. Many residents were forced out of the city, into the suburbs and beyond.

NYCHA, Related and Essence insist that mass displacement will not occur. They say that residents will retain lease rights and pay a maximum of 30% of their income toward rent in their new buildings. They estimate that about 6% of tenants, roughly 100 households, will have to move during the rebuilding process. Still, residents are wary. George Weaver said that his biggest fears if demolition goes through are "homelessness and displacement. I mean, people will die."

THE DILEMMA

Most residents want repairs. And after decades of disinvestment in public housing by the federal government, some do want demolition.

"I'm disabled and elderly, and I am for the demolition. I want a new apartment," says Susan Kenney, a resident of Chelsea-Elliott Housing. She cites various repairs NYCHA has failed to keep up with and is confident that she will not be displaced. "The elevators break down. There's homeless in the building. The door is broken, no intercom system. And we got a lot of drugs in the building."

"The last thing anybody wants to do is demolition," says Acevedos. "But the reason for demolition is to create new buildings that won't deteriorate in the next 10 years."

Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine also supports the demolition plan. When *The Indy* asked him if he felt confident that the project would not lead to displacement, he hedged.

"We need to ask more questions about it," said Levine. "The way it's been explained so far — and again, we got to ask tough questions — is that they would first build new homes before any building would be demolished. And so that's a much better model, because you're not displaced all over New York City."

When asked about the Legal Aid Society and Community Service Society's criticism of the plan as not being resident-led, the borough president said he has been in touch with the leadership of Legal Aid Society, and praised them for asking "great questions" about the proposal.

Would people be allowed to remain on the NYCHA campus during the construction process? Would they be able to keep apartments big enough for their current family size? What will the income targets be for newly built affordable housing? These were more "great questions," Levine said. "We need to get answers," he added.

DETERMINED TO STAY

Both Lara and Mirandas say they will miss their homes and the feeling of community if the demolition goes through. "It won't be home," said Mirandas. "My biggest fear is my mother and how many elderly like her are going to be lost within their own community."

"I want to stay with the residents in my building, Lara added. "We know each other. … They've seen my kids grow up."

Alex MacDougall says advocates of the demolition and reconstruction view the plan as "exciting" for the future of affordable housing for New York City, something that "should raise every alarm bell it possibly can."

"We want to elevate the concerns that residents have shared with us: the displacement of elderly people, the gentrification of their communities, the 2,500 market rate units filled with people paying $8,000 a month for a two bedroom … [and] what that will mean for the community," MacDougall told *The Indy*.

"I think what they want is to make New York a city of the rich and get rid of the poor and working class," Weaver said.

Lara and Mirandas have created petitions, worked with organizers, and planned protests and rallies. They say they won't give up.

"We have to fight back. Listen, I will fight till I bleed," Lara said.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: *The Chelsea-Elliott Houses were built after World War II. They are located between W. 25th and W. 27th Streets from 9th to 10th Ave and house more than 2,400 NYCHA residents.*

UNCERTAIN FUTURE: *Jackie Lara worries about what will happen to her home of more than 20 years.*

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OWEN SCHACHT

WHOSE STREETS?: *Derrick Holmes, a Riders Alliance organizer, speaks at a July 11 rally urging the construction of a Fordham Road busway.*

ABANDONED IN THE OUTER BOROUGHS

ERIC ADAMS' VOW TO BE A 'BUS MAYOR" REMAINS UNFULFILLED

By Owen Schacht

Standing on Fordham Road waiting for the Bx12-Select bus, I saw some faint red letters on the pavement. As I wondered whether walking would be faster than taking the bus, I realized I was gazing upon the remnants of a bus lane — one crowded by parked SUVs and cruising sedans.

The Bx12, which runs from Inwood in upper Manhattan to Co-op City, is the city's second-busiest bus route. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority estimates that on a typical day, Fordham Road, the central Bronx's main commercial corridor, hosts 85,000 bus riders. In 2008, it became the city's first street to feature the Select Bus Service, with reserved lanes and riders paying their fare before they get on. The Bx12's average speed improved to just over nine miles per hour, 20% faster than it had been the previous year.

Today, according to the MTA, it inches along at less than four miles per hour when traveling westbound between roughly Webster Avenue and Grand Concourse, in the heart of a bustling commercial district.

"That is absolutely unacceptable for a city and a community that is so deeply dependent on transit like our own," said Derrick Holmes, digital strategist at the Riders Alliance, during a rally on July 11 to urge the construction of a busway on Fordham Road that would limit the half-mile section between Morris and Webster avenues to buses and trucks, with cars allowed for only for one block at a time.

"We know exactly how to fix Fordham Road, to make buses faster, make trips more reliable for these people," Holmes said, "and that is to implement a new busway."

The city's Department of Transportation (DOT) was set to implement a busway on Fordham this past spring, estimating that it would boost bus speeds by 30%. But on May 26, leaders of seven major institutions and business groups in the area — Fordham University, the New York Botanical Garden, The Bronx Zoo, Monroe College, SBH Health System, and the Fordham Road and Belmont Business Improvement Districts — sent the Adams administration a letter urging the mayor to intervene. They argued that millions of people drive cars to the Fordham Road area, and that the proposed busway would actually increase traffic.

Five days later, the DOT presented a revised proposal with three plans. The department is opting for Alternative A, which would create one lane in each direction reserved for buses. Busway supporters are urging Alternative C, a two-way busway from Jerome Avenue in the west to Webster Avenue in the east.

According to a DOT street survey from July 2019, 86% of visitors to businesses on Fordham Road arrive by bus, train or walking.

"Buses are the transportation backbone of our city," Mayor Eric Adams said in August 2022 at a Better Buses for Brooklyn rally. Improving the city's creaking bus system was a key part of his agenda during his 2021 mayoral campaign.

Adams promised to build 150 miles of new bus lanes and busways during his first term, but just 6.8 miles have been completed. The Streets Plan, which was signed into law by then-Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2019, mandated the construction of 20 miles of camera-protected bus lanes in 2022 and 30 more miles in each of the next four years, for a total of 140 miles by 2026.

Buses provide crucial access to areas of the city that subways cannot reach, especially outside Manhattan. They are the only direct way to make east-west trips along Fordham Road, to get to Brooklyn College from Brownsville or Borough Park, or to travel from Flushing to Jamaica, Queens. Buses are also the only way to go crosstown in much of Manhattan.

They are invaluable for New Yorkers, particularly working-class New Yorkers. According to a survey conducted by the office of former Comptroller Scott Stringer in 2019, the median income of bus riders across the city was $30,000, with 62% female and 77% people of color.

While buses are controlled by the MTA, a state-operated authority, the mayor has some power to improve them. "New York City government has control of city streets and thus where to install bus lanes and what kind," *Gotham Gazette* reporter Nicholas Liu noted in June. But improvements to the bus system have been slow and overshadowed by flashy subway extensions, such as the $2.42 billion spent on extending the 7 train one stop to Hudson Yards.

A study published in *Transportation Research Record* in 2012 found that the inauguration of the Bx12-SBS resulted in "a 20% reduction in travel time along the corridor and an 11.5% increase in ridership." The project cost $10 million and gave rise to 98% satisfaction with the new bus service, the study says.

Busways have proven effective in other parts of the city. In June 2022, the 14th Street busway was made permanent. The DOT website explains that "the project, which serves approximately 28,000 daily M14 riders, combines blocks of exclusive access and standard bus lanes to provide bus priority from 9th Avenue to 1st Avenue." Bus speeds increased by 24% and ridership by 30% on what had been one of Manhattan's most congested streets. In Queens, the Main Street busway in Flushing, a car-free 0.3-mile stretch of road between Northern Boulevard and Sanford Avenue that serves 155,000 daily riders, was implemented in 2021.

Increased bus ridership also lowers the number of cars on the road, which reduces the amount of exhaust-spewed pollutants such as ozone and fine particulate matter — particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter that are particularly harmful to children, the elderly and people with cardiovascular conditions.

Eric Adams campaigned on being "the Bus Mayor," Derrick Holmes tells *The Indypendent*, but "the mayor is failing to stand up to his own words, and is failing to do right by the riders that he promised he would speed up buses for."

ALL ABOARD!

New Yorkers will enjoy free bus service on five MTA bus routes starting Sep. 1. The free bus routes, which will serve low-income communities, are:

- **Bx18 (Morris Heights to Highbridge)**
- **B60 (Williamsburg to Canarsie)**
- **M116 (West Side to East Harlem)**
- **Q4 (Cambria Heights to Jamaica)**
- **S46/96 (St. George to West Side Plaza)**

More than 40 U.S. cities provide free bus service, including Kansas City; Albuquerque; Akron, Ohio; Bozeman, Montana and Corvallis, Oregon. The Staten Island ferry, which serves 22 million passengers per year, has been free since 1997.

New York City's free bus routes are a pilot project to gauge the impact of fare-free service on ridership. To date, other cities have found that ridership increases when there is no fare, while crimes on buses go down because there are more people present.

"We've shown the will, and now we're going to expand it in the years to come," said Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist from Queens who fought to get the pilot project funded in this year's state budget.

– INDYPENDENT STAFF

ROCKAWAY PARKS CONSERVANCY

MY FAVORITE BROOKLYN-QUEENS BIKE ROUTE

ENJOY THIS 69-MILE BIKE RIDE ALL IN ONE DAY, OR DO IT IN SECTIONS

By Derek Ludovici

One of my favorite activities in the summer and fall is taking long bike rides around the outer boroughs. It's a great way to get to summer fun like the Rockaways, or to meet up with friends at a park. With a transit system designed to carry people to and from Manhattan, biking is a great alternative to explore all that the outer boroughs have to offer. My go-to loop takes you along much of the perimeter of Queens and Brooklyn in just under 69 miles. If this already sounds intimidating, don't worry; each section can be done as a much shorter loop.

For this ride, I would bring spare tubes, enough snacks for two stops and plenty of water. A smartphone will be useful, as some parts of this ride are a little complicated. I try to give precise directions at the most convoluted parts, but it's useful to look at the map ahead of time, and if you are in an area that's new to you, at the start of each section heading below.

I've written directions that sketch out the way I normally take the route, but you can start anywhere. If you will be on the Bay Parkway, Belt Parkway, or Cross Island Parkway sections of this route after dusk or dark, I suggest riding the route in the opposite direction of what I wrote, or you will have headlights in your face, and it will be dangerous and unpleasant.

See below the highlights of each section of the route. To see the full, detailed instructions, visit https://indypendent.org/2023/08/bikeroute/.

NORTHERN QUEENS

On this part of the route, you'll visit Astoria Park, pass by Laguardia Airport and traverse the Flushing Bay Promenade, where you can stop and watch the planes land as egrets fish in the tall grasses of the bay. For a short ride, you can turn off at Citi Field and enter Flushing Meadows Park. Or, continue on to Utopia Parkway, eventually reaching Little Bay Park/Fort Totten. Take in the view of the Whitestone Bridge, and explore the preserved buildings of the fort. This is a good time to hydrate and refill your water.

EASTERN & CENTRAL QUEENS

From Fort Totten, take the Cross Island Greenway, a nice pedestrian path squeezed between the expressway and Little Neck Bay. After a few turns, you'll find a bike path that takes you around Alley Pond Park and some of the hillier riding of this trip. The ghost of Robert Moses joins you as you navigate around expressways. Then, you'll cycle over to Forest Park, where you can enjoy the serenity and cooler temperatures that Queens' only forest can provide. After that, you'll have another opportunity to turn home.

SOUTHERN QUEENS TO SOUTH BROOKLYN

If you are continuing on your 69-mile journey, you'll exit Forest Park, and after a few turns, you'll end up on the beautiful Belt Parkway Greenway with views of Jamaica Bay.

BELT PARKWAY SECTION

Alternatively, you can take bike paths through Broad Channel over to the Rockaways. Bike all the way to Jacob Riis Park and over the bridge to meet back up with the Belt Parkway. If traversing the Rockaways, check out Tacoway Beach taqueria on Beach 87th Street to refuel. The boardwalk also offers plenty of options along your way. Alternatively pack a lunch and eat at Shirley Chisholm Park along the Belt Parkway. For shorter rides, take the belt and exit at Fountain Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue, Canarsie Pier or Flatbush Avenue.

SUMMER BLISS: *While biking along the Belt Parkway, stop and enjoy the Plumb Beach Recreational Area by Jamaica Bay.*

SOUTH BROOKLYN & THE WATER FRONT

The Belt Parkway will take you all the way to Plumb Beach Recreation Area, dropping you on Emmons Avenue. From Emmons you can either wind down to Coney Island, or follow a bike path all the way to the Shore Parkway Bike Path. Once you cross Bay Pkwy, the path as it becomes an enjoyable promenade that runs along the Hudson River, under the Verrazano Bridge, all the way to Owls Head Park. Then, you can head to Downtown Brooklyn, or, as I prefer, cut into Red Hook via the Ninth Street Bridge, and ride outside the piers until Brooklyn Bridge Park. I always make a stop at Four and 20 Blackbird (Third Avenue and 8th Street) for a slice of pie before the final push. For a shorter route, take Bedford Avenue to McCarren Park in Greenpoint.

NORTH BROOKLYN TO ASTORIA

Go through Dumbo, take the path around the Navy Yard, and then over to the Pulaski Bridge. After a few turns, you'll coast downhill to Astoria Park. Stretch out while enjoying its grassy meadows and the view of the river as trains pass on the Hell Gate Bridge.

TEAMSTERS

Continued from page 7

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If the UPS contract campaign didn't end with the dramatic confrontation some hoped for, it still has left a powerful impression on workers who were following it.

"I'm getting calls from other people in trade unions — electrical workers, plumbers, pipefitters — I got texts all in my phone, 'Congratulations, you guys got a big contract,'" Rosario said.

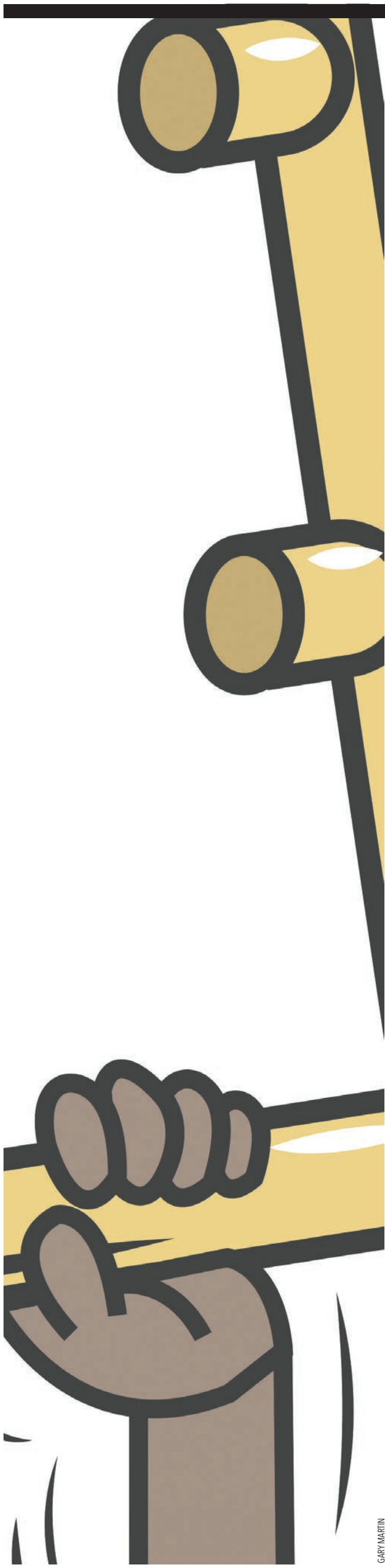
The same optimism permeated the DSA town hall as actors, nurses, pizzeria workers and Starbucks baristas spoke about their strikes, their organizing campaigns and their belief that the labor movement was only gaining strength as more and more workers refused to accept the indignities of America's second gilded age. Most of the participants were in their twenties and thirties.

As for the Teamsters, they pursued their aggressive contract campaign against UPS with Amazon as their ultimate target. The union has a vested interest in performing this colossal task: Just as the Teamsters raised the industry standards for everyone in logistics, Amazon's egregious working conditions have lowered the standards.

"I'm getting [calls from workers at] Amazon like crazy; people just saying, 'You guys did great.' You know, 'We're looking forward to talking with you guys and working with you guys," said Rosario who vowed that '"We are going to laser focus on Amazon once we get this contract done."

In fact, some early skirmishes in that battle are already being fought.

In April, the Teamsters successfully organized and won a contract for a group of 84 Amazon-contracted drivers in Southern California, who joined Teamsters Local 396. Amazon promptly cut ties with its sub-contractor and the drivers lost their jobs. The Teamsters have filed Unfair Labor Practice grievances with the NLRB claiming that Amazon illegally fired the drivers for unionizing because it does in fact act as their boss — the drivers wear Amazon uniforms, they answer to company management, which has the right to fire them. The Amazon drivers and dispatchers began their unfair labor practice strike in Palmdale, California on June 24. Fighting to get their jobs back, they have picketed 10 Amazon warehouses around the country in the past month — in California, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan and Georgia — with "Teamsters locals and other unions and organizations showing support everywhere they go," says Rosario.



GARY MARTIN

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION'S LEGACY AND WHAT COMES NEXT

By Linda Martín Alcoff

Affirmative action was never a perfect solution. On the day I got my first real academic position, I ran into an acquaintance who asked how my job search was going. When I shared the news of my success, it took only a split second before he replied, with a funny look on his face, "They must have been so happy to get a good woman." (Philosophy in those days was a male-dominated profession, almost all white, more like the hard sciences than the humanities.)

My short-lived elation just as immediately took a dive. I could see what I was in for, from colleagues, students, and those both unfamiliar and familiar with my work. One can never prove their worthiness against imaginary competition. The sense I had that day has been confirmed throughout my career — as recently as this summer, when an award I was given was castigated on Twitter as only explainable by affirmative action.

This issue of stigma has figured prominently in Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas's arguments for eradicating affirmative action. In his partial dissent against the Grutter v. Bollinger ruling in 2003, he wrote that, because of affirmative action, all Black people "are tarred as undeserving," as it raises the question of whether their advancement was based on merit. Thomas argued that "asking the question itself unfairly marks those blacks who would succeed without discrimination."

With his help, the Supreme Court hammered the last nail in the coffin of affirmative action in a pair of rulings it issued on June 30. Its demise began back in 1978 with the Regents of the University of California v. Bakke decision, which forbade "racial quotas" but allowed universities to consider race as one possible factor in admitting students. That decision was affirmed in the Grutter case, in which the University of Michigan's admissions policies were allowed by distinguishing a "race-conscious" from "race quotas."

The most significant driver of these arguments was, ostensibly, the protection of individual rights. No applicant, white or non-white, should be reduced to their race. The latest ruling allows a new loophole, but one that is also based on the ideal of individualism: Race can be taken into account only if applicants themselves discuss their race in their admissions materials.

In a Pew Poll taken earlier this year, 50% of respondents opposed colleges considering race or ethnicity in admissions. This was not just among whites: 29% of Black people disapproved, as did 39% of Latinx people, 52% of English-speaking Asian Americans, and 57% of whites. In a CBS News poll in June, 70% said colleges should not be allowed to consider race — but 53% said affirmative-action programs should be continued.

It sounds like common sense that no policy should reduce anyone to their race, ethnicity or gender, presumptively assuming it to be the explanation of all their successes and all their failures. For Thomas, the stigma inflicted on recipients of affirmative action of being reduced to one's race undermines its power to help undo racist prejudices. (Strangely enough, affirmative-action critics like Thomas never talk about the stigma experienced by the children of the superrich who are the beneficiaries of legacy admissions, a pay-to-play practice common at many prestigious private universities.)

Thus, we can read opposition to affirmative action as not simply based on racism, but sometimes on the desire to uphold a certain amount of individualism, to recognize that race is not always determinant in the same way for everyone. The Supreme Court ruling may look nicely aligned with these latter sentiments, because by disallowing quotas and only permitting considerations of race alluded to by applicants themselves, it limits outsiders' ability to decide how significant race is in our lives.

How can we address structural forms of injustice while upholding individualism? Stigmatization of the recipients of affirmative action is not produced out of thin air, but in a climate clogged with all sorts of racism and sexism.

Racial remedies come in two broad categories: Backward-looking remedies seek to repair past injustice, while forward-looking ones focus on changing the future. Affirmative action was initially put forward in the 1960s as a way to repair the crimes of Jim Crow, but it has come to be defended more often in the courts and among policy analysts as a forward-looking project. In this light, the discomfort experienced by the first generation of female airline pilots, Black judges, Asian-American English professors and Latinx professionals is supposed to be a service rendered to create progress about how people think about who can do what.

The hope is that the next generation won't experience as much stigma. However, this assumes that the abilities of the first "non-traditional" hires will shine through the stigma, allay the skepticism, and shrivel the old ideas with the force of our simple but obvious functionality. Alas, if it were only so.

Despite the persistence of racism, forward-looking justifications for affirmative action still stand as a means to an end. There is no question that seeing a diverse pool of people in every field has given millions of people experiences that contest old ideologies. Plus, it has improved many lives.

I think there are two critical lessons we should take from the current ruling.

The first is that institutions need to step up. There are many legal policies we can use to redress the structural injustices of both race and class. One is what the California State University system does with "educational equity" provisions that seek to neutralize the effect of zip codes on admissions. Another is the program in my home state of Florida (believe it or not) in which high-school students with B averages or above can go to state colleges and universities tuition-free.

The second lesson is especially pertinent to the most recent Court ruling, which used some Asian-American plaintiffs to argue that affirmative action discriminated against them. They claimed that basing admissions on standardized tests would make racism a thing of the past, since admissions would then be based on pure merit. Some universities used quotas to set a maximum number of Asian-American and, in the past, Jewish acceptances, to ensure that, despite their high test scores, they would not 'replace' too many Gentile whites.

Lots of empirical evidence now shows the problem of relying on standardized tests. Their power to predict students' success is negligible beyond the first year of college. While relying on them would eliminate the racism of maximum-number quotas, it would firm up the fences that exclude Black and Brown applicants, who test poorly by comparison to others regardless of their social class.

Here is the lesson: Since racism does not take unified forms, its solutions cannot be generic. Only a rich knowledge of the specific and variable forms racism uses to clog our thinking will lead to effective pathways forward. Let's start planning the trip.

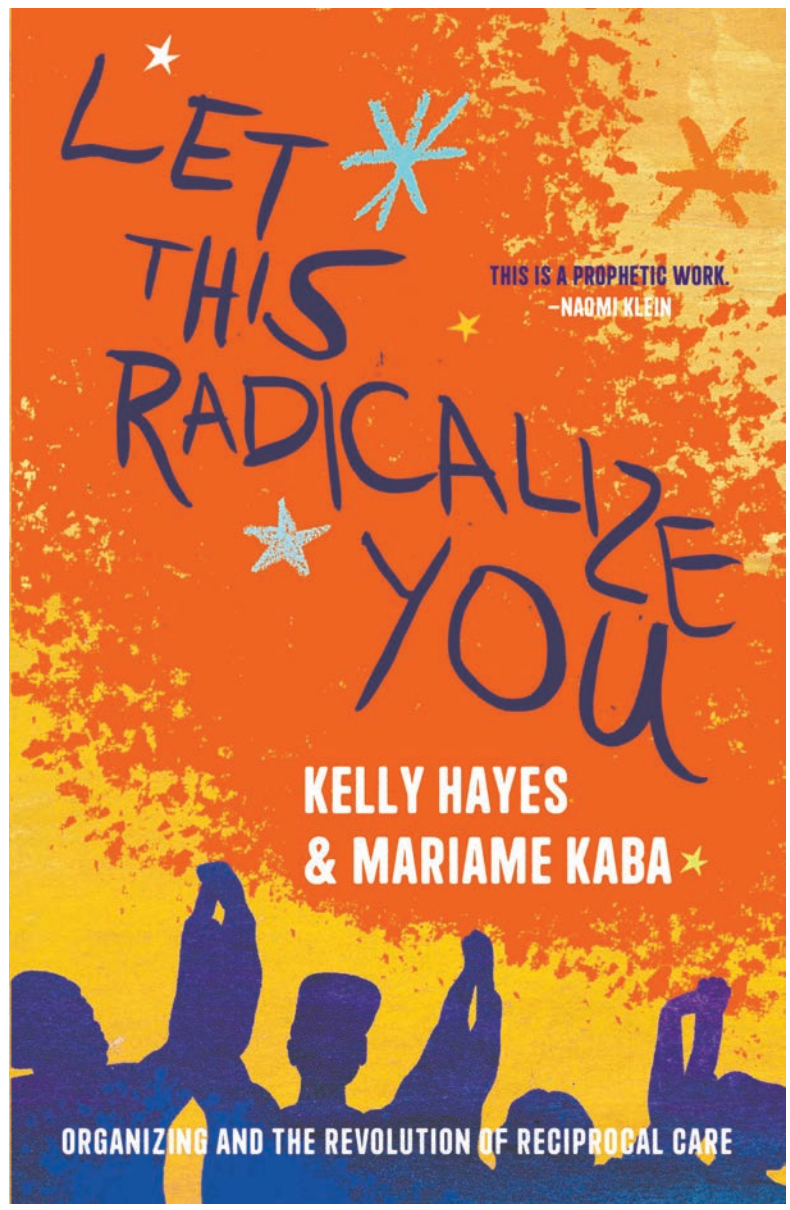
Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at the CUNY Graduate Center and Hunter College. She is the author of The Future of Whiteness and Visible Identities: Race, Gender and Self.

HOW TO FIGHT FOR RADICAL CHANGE & NEVER BURN OUT

Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care
By Kelly Hayes & Mariame Kaba
Haymarket Books, 296 pages, May 2023

By Eleanor J. Bader

Anyone who has done community organizing knows that there are no formulas for successful resistance. At the same time abundant lessons exist, and it is possible to avoid predictable pitfalls, learn valuable skills and utilize insights from past struggles to plan today's campaigns for social justice. What's more, whether the struggle is for prison abolition or for funding for a community play space, how we formulate demands and mobilize support can have long-lasting reverberations. Needless to say, thoughtful consideration of tactics and strategies are required.



Let This Radicalize You by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba dives into this terrain; it is both a how-to guide for community activists and a deeply-felt assessment of how we can better support one another to sustain lifelong involvement in progressive efforts. Throughout, the book combines practical advice with the belief that a better and more equitable world can be fought for and won.

And, since both authors are seasoned writers, educators and organizers, their personal experiences — and those of colleagues in a wide swath of social justice movements whose insights are included — give the text heft and gravitas. The end result? *Let This Radicalize You* is a well-wrought antidote to the pervasive despair of living in Trumpian times.

Among its most salient lessons is the need to mix horror with hope. "It's easy to assume that if others knew how bad things were, they too would take action," the authors write. "This assumption can sometimes lead activists to become walking, talking encyclopedias of doom."

But experience has taught the pair that the recitation of ills seldom works: Rather than energizing communities, it enervates them. "If spitting horrifying facts at people changed minds and built movements, we would have overthrown the capitalist system long ago," conclude Hayes and Kaba. "The facts have always been on our side."

Instead, they continue, conjuring a vision of what might be, alongside the opportunity to participate in projects geared toward bringing that vision to fruition, allows us to win reforms, if not a broader societal overhaul.

There's also much more there.

Let This Radicalize You admonishes activists to avoid being propelled into working 24/7/365, since no one can sustain such a relentless pace, no matter how urgent the cause. Burnout, the authors caution, is real and can drain movements of people with experience. Breaks are essential, as is recognition that we do not need to be in lock-step agreement with everyone who's on our side. We sometimes simply don't like one another, they concede, but "organizing isn't matchmaking. … We have to be able to organize outside of our comfort zones."

While I wish the book had delved deeper and provided examples of how we can productively engage with people who have retrograde ideas about race, class, gender and gender identity, the text's emphasis on listening is important.

"Listening is a practice," write the authors, "and at times it's a strategic one" that takes to heart the organizing maxim that it can be a fatal error to impose an agenda on a community that does not want it. "It is difficult to meet someone where they're at when you do not know where they are. Until you have heard someone out, you do not know where they are, so how could you hope to meet them there?" they ask.

Hayes and Kaba further suggest that humor can be an essential tool to defuse tensions and break logjams.

That said, the book reminds those of us who tend toward impatience that organizing is slow work, that momentum typically builds over time and can't be rushed.

These are wise words, and while the book will likely be most impactful for newbie organizers, veteran activists will find value in its pages. By taking the long view of change, the book is boldly optimistic and calls on each of us to do our part to repair the world.

Kaba is known for reminding those in her orbit to see crises as opportunities for radical action rather than hopelessness. *Let This Radicalize You* urges us forward, prodding us to bring the world we want into existence with creativity, persistence and sass.

CANNERS

Continued from page 5

KENNY
6 months canning
Some people might have an issue with you going through their bags. It makes sense; it can feel a bit invasive, and you're complete strangers. I'll try to explain that I'm not doing anything bad. Other times, you let them talk and you do what you gotta do. People think you won't go through the trouble of tidying things up, they think you just come and make a mess. But I try not to.

If I had a choice, it's probably not the number one thing I would want to do. But everything happens for a reason and currently, this is what I have to deal with. Canning has some potential, but it's not what I see myself doing in the long run. I got a few exams I want to pass, like the [Cisco Certified Network Associate]. I want to learn Spanish and get certification for that. I got other things I want to do, some personal projects. Once I get where I'm planning to go, will I stop [canning]? I don't know.

LINDA
13 years canning; retired; started "Cans for Comic Relief,"a charity for children that has raised over $25,000.
I was on a night shift at the airport, so my shift would be ending around the time that TSA closed. So I put on the gloves and I started digging. It got to a point where I was leaving every night with these two big plastic bags. There was an all-night Key Food on Flatbush, and I would clear them out [at the bottle-exchange machine] at 3 A.M.

One time, I was at the machine there, and all of a sudden, something hits my head, and I see a plastic bottle. I turn around, and some guy's laughing. He assumed I was homeless and because of that, he could treat me with contempt.

REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

Dear Reverend Billy,
I'm a big fan of yours and appreciate all that you do. As far as climate change goes, do you think we've missed our chance to stop it over the past 20-30 years with all the dithering and inaction by our leaders? At this point, It seems like it's easier to go numb and try to ignore what's happening as best as one can.

— DOUG

Dear Doug,
The middle class of the USA is locked up in passivity, locked up in a prison of "isms." Religious fundamentalism, capitalism, racism, sexism, consumerism — we got isms to the wall. There is only one force that can free us from this bondage: The Earth, the planet Earth.

In autocracy, it's simple to keep control. The dictator has one party, lots of guns and a controlled media, and a lot of fear. In a commercial democracy, the ruler is the investor class, and they need to keep those isms growing around us like dazzling walls that simulate life. The Ism Prison…

What the Earth is doing right now, especially in the last month of extreme heat and a world of natural disasters is pull us from that virtual reality. We have noticed in our work, a basic change in the usual passivity. Many of us no longer consider the climate cataclysm merely a three-minute news item, in other words…. consumable information. A critical mass has been reached, and it's a shock.

It is well known that JPMorgan Chase is the dirtiest bank because of all the funding it provides to fossil fuel projects around the world. The Earth Church invades the Rockefeller Center JPMorgan Chase a lot, 15 times in the last two years. We do this at lunch-time so that the singers who have jobs can use their lunch break for our "Radical Lunch." The managers inside the bank often grimace when they see us parade through the door with anthems about the Earth. (In the last days, researchers from Stand.earth and indigenous groups revealed that Chase has been financing Amazon rainforest killing projects in Peru, Colombia, Brazil and Ecuador.) JPMorgan Chase tops the list of forest killers, with Citibank in second.

This of course is featured in our chanting and preaching, and the managers sit there in their plush chairs, our audience until the police arrive. But last week they didn't call the police. Our reception seems changed. We sense a new thoughtfulness in some of them. The heatwaves on three continents might be impacting them. Of course there is the laughter and moaning and swearing, but in our action last week we found some of them sitting there like they had heatwaves in their air-conditioning, stuck in their moral quandary.

We urged them to hack into that computerized money flow. Detour the millions meant for the TransCanada pipeline. Route the money away from the Wet'suwet'en and Mohawk lands. Protect the Amazon. Starve out the ranchers and miners and dams. Hack, strike, practice hidden labor slow-downs. Be a whistleblower in the dirtiest fossil bank. Radical whispers at the water cooler. Work undercover for the Earth.

Doug, I'm using this as an example. All of us need to turn against this fossil economy. This is what each of us needs to do in our own lives. Our work for the Earth will be scary, and probably illegal if it is to have any impact at all. We will help each other break out of our "Ism Prison".

EARTHALUJAH!

REVEREND BILLY TALEN IS THE PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? EMAIL REVBILLY@REVBILLY.COM AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.

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Aug 13 @ 2:00 PM: MANHATTAN -- Central Park Bandshell, 72nd Street Crosswalk
Aug 18 @ 5:00 PM: BROOKLYN -- Coney Island Boardwalk @ W. 21st Street
Aug 19 @ 2:00 PM: MANHATTAN -- Abe Lebwohl Park @ St. Marks Church, E. 10th St. & 2nd Ave.
Aug 20 @2:00 PM: MANHATTAN -- Jackie Robinson Park, W. 147th St. & Bradhurst Ave.
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